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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: FEBRUARY 09, 2010

Summary: India's proposal for resumption of talks with Pakistan continued to dominate the media Tuesday, and Defense Secretary Gates' statement denying that "U.S. is not propping India" received prominent display. All major newspapers covered reports that the National Assembly Standing Committee on Interior rejected the GOP stance on Blackwater presence in Pakistan, and asked the authorities to inform about those foreigners who are operating in the country with sophisticated weapons. Papers also quoted Interior Minister Malik's assertion that the Blackwater is not operating in the country. Newspapers reported that the sister and mother of Dr. Aafia met with Prime Minister Gilani who assured them of the government's support for her release. Ambassador Patterson's Lahore visit also garnered extensive media attention. Reports and photographs of her meeting with former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and visit to the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry were highlighted. The Lahore-based liberal English paper, "Daily Times," published a Washington Post report quoting a Washington think-tank Third Way, that "Al Qaeda is a wounded but dangerous enemy." Media reported an Al Qaeda leader Sufyan al Azdi's statement, in an audio message released on the internet, calling for attacks on U.S. interests everywhere. Newspapers covered a report that the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has sent eight female suicide bombers to attack high-value targets in Punjab. Coverage of the assassination attempt on senior politician and by-election candidate Sheikh Rashid in Rawalpindi outside his election office dominated front pages this morning. Commenting on the reported major NATO offensive in Afghan province Helmand, "Dawn," noted that "it seems unlikely that the Taliban will take on the might of ISAF head-on: they may prefer to melt away instead." Toeing the line, "Daily Times," called the Taliban's defiance "merely a feint," and "when the coalition forces actually move in, the guerrillas could just melt away." End Summary.

TOP STORIES

News Story: America For Back Channel Diplomacy - "The Nation"
(02/09)

"United States has dismissed Pakistani perceptions that it was propping India, saying that New Delhi 'did not need us for that purpose' and has advocated that the two neighbors resolve their differences bilaterally, reported Times of India on Monday. 'I would tell you that the United States clearly has not or has ever propped up India. India has not needed us for that purpose and, in fact, those familiar with the history would know that our relationship with India was fairly strained until not too many years ago,' Defence Secretary Robert Gates has said."

News Story: NA Body Seeks Comprehensive Report On Blackwater -

"Daily Times" (02/09)

"Rejecting the Interior Ministry's claim of the 'non-existence' of the U.S.-based security firm Blackwater in the country, the National Assembly Standing Committee on Interior on Monday directed the ministry to present a comprehensive report on the issue."

News Story: No Blackwater In Country: Malik - "Daily Times" (02/09)

"Blackwater is not operating in the country and national security agencies are protecting the Prime Minister and the President, Interior Minister Rehman Malik said on Monday. He said this while responding to a point raised by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Member of National Assembly Ishrat Ashraf during the proceedings of the House."

News Story: Blackwater Present In Country: NA Body; Secretary Interior Denies Claim - "The Nation" (02/09)

"Secretary Interior Qamar Zaman again negated on Monday the presence of Blackwater, DynCorp or any other foreign security agency in the country. 'Neither Blackwater and DynCorp nor any other such security agency is operating in the country,' he told the National Assembly Standing Committee on Interior. However, members of National Assembly's Standing Committee on Interior said that the private U.S. security firm Blackwater was present in the country."

News Story: Dr. Aafia's Mother, Sister Call On PM - "Dawn" (02/09)

"Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani said on Monday the government would continue to extend diplomatic, legal and moral support to Dr. Aafia Siddiqui during her ordeal. He was talking to Dr. Aafia's mother Mrs. Ismat Siddiqui and Sister Dr. Fauzia Siddiqui who called on him in Karachi."

News Story: Pak Embassy Did Not Pursue Aafia's Case Properly - "The Nation" (02/09)

"The Government's lack of interest, despite its tall claims for early release of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, can be judged from the fact that no one from Pakistan's Embassy attended Dr. Aafia's hearing in the New York court that convicted her of late, in spite of the fact that all allegations leveled against her were proven wrong, 'The Nation' learned reliably."

News Story: U.S. Gives \$200,000 As Donation To LABARD - "Business Recorder" (02/09)

"The U.S. Ambassador Anne W. Patterson on Monday handed over a cheque of \$200,000 to Muhammad Pervez Malik, President of the Lahore Businessmen Association for Rehabilitation of Disabled (LABARD) as a donation. Speaking on the occasion, the U.S. Ambassador said that United States would continue to work with the LABARD in its endeavor to impart vocational training to the disabled persons."

Pakistani Public Angry On Conviction of Dr. Aafia: Nawaz Sharif - "Jang" (02/09)

"PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif on Monday held a meeting with U.S. Ambassador Anne W. Patterson in Lahore and discussed with important issues including the changing political situation in the region, Indian offer for dialogue with Pakistan, London Conference, negotiations with the Taliban, and others. Nawaz Sharif said that Pakistani public is angry with the U.S. over the conviction of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui. He urged Washington to exert pressure on New Delhi for the early solution of the Kashmir issue."

News Story: Al Qaeda Is A Wounded But Dangerous Enemy: Report - "Daily Times" (02/09)

"New assessments of Al Qaeda by the top U.S. counter-terrorism experts offer grounds for both optimism and concern a year after U.S. President Obama took office, but warn that the Al Qaeda is a wounded but dangerous enemy, according to an article published in the 'Washington Post.'"

News Story: Al Qaeda Leader Calls For Attacks On U.S. Interests -

"Dawn" (02/09)

"Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the Yemen-based group that claimed a botched Christmas Day attack on a U.S. airliner, on Monday called for U.S. interests to be targeted 'everywhere.' 'American and Crusader interests are everywhere and their agents are moving everywhere,' the militant group's number two, Said al-Shihri, said in an audio message posted on the Internet."

News Story: Six Held For Planning Attack On Five-Star Hotel, U.S. Nationals - "Daily Times" (02/09)

"Police on Monday arrested six suspected terrorists from GT Road, Shahdara, including a would-be suicide bomber, who were allegedly plotting to attack a five-star hotel and kill U.S. nationals. Addressing a press conference, Senior Superintendent of Police (Investigation) Zulfiqar Hameed said the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan-linked terrorists were planning to target foreigners living at a well-known hotel in the city, adding that police recovered detonators, suicide jackets, 26 grenades, four kilogram's of hashish and explosive material from their possession."

News Story: Three Killed As Gunmen Attack Election Office: Sheikh Rashid Defies Death Squad - "Dawn" (02/09)

"Awami Muslim League Chief Sheikh Rashid Ahmed was injured while three other people, including two bodyguards, were killed when gunmen opened fire on his vehicle outside his party's election office here on Monday. Rawalpindi's Regional Police Officer Aslam Tareen termed the attack an act of terrorism and targeted killing."

TERRORISM/MILITARY ISSUES

News Story: U.S., NATO Plan Big Offensive In Helmand - "Dawn" (02/09)

"U.S. and NATO forces are set to launch in southern Afghanistan this week a major offensive being described as the biggest assault of its kind since Vietnam four decades ago. 'Our basic strategy is, is to reverse the momentum of the Taliban; to deny them control of population centers and production centers,' said U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates."

News Story: NATO Seeks Surrender But Taliban Defiant - "Dawn" (02/09)

"NATO Commanders urged the Taliban to surrender as troops dug in on Monday for a major assault on a key stronghold of militants in southern Afghanistan, sending thousands of residents fleeing. Final preparations for battle with Taliban militants around Marjah in Helmand province, which could begin within days, had begun, Lt-Col James Matt Baker of 1st Battalion 3rd Marines Regiment said referring to the final phase of assault preparations."

News Story: Taliban Vow To Defend Marjah - "The Nation" (02/09)

"Taliban fighters have pledged to defend the town of Marjah from an imminent NATO offensive, saying that their ranks had been bolstered by foreign fighters eager to fight against western troops. NATO commanders called on the Taliban to surrender as troops dug in Monday for a major assault on one of the last insurgent strongholds in southern Afghanistan, sending thousands of residents fleeing."

News Story: Two NATO Troops Killed - "The Nation" (02/09)

"Two soldiers with NATO-led forces fighting Taliban-led insurgents were killed in a bomb explosion in southern Afghanistan, NATO said on Monday."

News Story: 12 Soldiers Killed In South Waziristan - "The News" (02/09)

"Twelve soldiers embraced martyrdom while two others were injured in a clash with militants during the ongoing operation Rah-e-Nijaat in South Waziristan Agency (SWA), the ISPR said on Monday."

News Story: 15 Compounds Cleared In S. Waziristan - "The Nation" (02/09)

"Security forces have apprehended five terrorists and cleared 15 compounds, besides seizing a huge cache of arms and ammunition in South Waziristan Agency and Swat-Malakand region, ISPR reported on Monday."

News Story: Several Jundullah Militants Extradited To Iran: Fehmida - "Daily Times" (02/09)

"Pakistani security forces have captured several members of the Jundullah terrorist group and handed them over to Iranian authorities, National Assembly Speaker Fehmida Mirza has said, according to Iran's Press TV channel."

POLITICAL ISSUES

News Story: U.S. Sees Improvement In India's Attitude - "Dawn" (02/09)

"The United States says it has seen a positive change in India's attitude towards Pakistan, after the relationship between the two neighbors was stalled in the aftermath of the November 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai. The 2010 threat assessment report of the U.S. intelligence community points out that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh publicly reaffirmed two critical points about Pakistan: 'That India does not want to see the country fail, and that Pakistan is engaged in efforts to combat the Taliban operating on Pakistani territory.'"

News Story: No Hegemonic Aim But Defence Needs To Be Met: Gilani - "Dawn" (02/09)

"Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has said Pakistan does not harbor any hegemonic designs in the region, but cannot remain oblivious to the need of equipping its armed forces to enable them to meet legitimate defence needs. He was speaking at the induction of the second Chinese-built F-22P frigate, PNS Shamsheer, into Pakistan Navy at the dockyard in Karachi on Monday."

News Story: Pakistan May Adopt Tough Stance Over Indian Talks Offer - "Daily Times" (02/09)

"Pakistan might adopt a tough stance over India's offer for talks and press for 'result-oriented dialogue' linked to a timeline for the resolution of all outstanding issues between the two countries, including the Kashmir dispute, according to diplomatic sources."

News Story: UNSC's Surprise 'Welcome' To London Conference - "The Nation" (02/09)

"Amid hue and cry over the failure of London Conference without yielding any worthy outcome, the United Nations, in a surprising move, has 'welcomed' the results of the same moot. The United Nations' Security Council on Friday has come up with all praises for the controversial London moot, which has faced enormous criticism from media, key regional players, and Taliban as well thanks to its contradictory and impractical agenda."

News Story: London Conference - Rushing For Exit - "The Nation" (02/09)

"Those with interest in the military history would know that withdrawal in face of mounting enemy pressure is one of the most difficult operations to execute. The luxury to pack up and 'run away to fight another day' in face of a determined enemy who would like to drive home the advantage of his superiority is simply not available. Every situation has its own peculiarities but invariably it requires, of the weaker side, a well thought strategy coupled with grit, determination and sufficient pluck to instill the fear of God into an overbearing enemy before breaking contact in a clean manner. For U.S. and NATO that moment has arrived in Afghanistan and London Conference, held on 28 January, made the design manifestly obvious to all and sundry."

ECONOMY/ENVIRONMENT

News Story: French, Dutch Fight Over Giving LNG To Pakistan - "The News" (02/09)

"Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin and his team is all set to thwart the attempt of an unscrupulous combine of oil industry heavyweights and some functionaries of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources to muscle out a lower bidder for the LNG supply contract in favor of a multinational, which had quoted a price higher by 1.5 to 2 per cent, a senior official told 'The News.' According to the details available with 'The News,' the process had come down to two foreign suppliers, one French and the other originally British but later turned Dutch, vying for the juicy multi-million dollar contract to supply Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to Pakistan."

MISCELLANEOUS

News Story: Value-Addition in Gemstones Can Earn More Foreign Exchange - "The Statesman" (02/09)

"Governor Owais Ahmad Ghani has said there existed vast potential to earn foreign exchange not only through promoting exploration of precious stones but also ensuring their value-addition. Addressing a ceremony of awarding diplomas to the graduates of Gemology Training Course in Peshawar, the Governor said 'we need to establish a Center of Excellence in this particular sector.... The 6-month course was meant for students from FATA and was arranged through the sponsorship of USAID.'" (Story not available online)

News Story: Iran Starts Making Drones - "The Nation" (02/09)

"Iranian Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi on Monday opened two production lines for the manufacture of 'advanced' unmanned aircraft or drones, Fars news agency reported. The drones would be able to carry out 'surveillance, detection and even assaults with high precision,' the report said."

EDITORIALS/OPINIONS

Editorial: Afghan Operation, an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/09)

"Operation Mushtarak in Helmand is part of ISAF's new strategy for Afghanistan: degrade the Taliban's resistance, secure south Afghanistan and then negotiate from a position of strength with the Taliban. Will it work? The answer depends on how success is measured. Start with the 'clear' stage of the counter-insurgency doctrine. It seems unlikely that the Taliban will take on the might of ISAF head-on: they may prefer to melt away instead.... Operation Mushtarak is not doomed to failure, but the question marks hanging over it are very large."

Editorial: Helmand Offensive, an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (02/09)

"As thousands of U.S. Marines leading a NATO and Afghan offensive on Marjah in Helmand province prepare their assault, the 2,000 or so Taliban fighters in the region seem to be digging in for what promises to be a very bloody battle. Marjah is considered the centre of the area controlled by the Taliban.... Considering that reports speak of this being the biggest military attack mounted by the U.S. since the Vietnam war, and the most extensive air bombardment planned since the Gulf war, not to mention being the first practical manifestation of President Obama's new strategy of surge and then talk, it is not unreasonable to surmise that if the Taliban mean what they are saying, that they intend to fight a fixed positional battle, they are likely to be overwhelmed by their adversaries' vastly superior firepower. That could mean that the Taliban's 'defiance' is merely a feint, and that when the coalition forces actually move in, the guerrillas could just melt away. Therefore the claims of the commander of the foreign forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, that the major offensive will send a 'strong signal', clear the south of the country, and provide the space for a change in governance in the Taliban stronghold, may prove ephemeral."

Editorial: Preparations For A Major Offensive On The Taliban Near The Pakistani Border, an editorial in the Lahore-based independent Urdu daily "Din" (cir. 5,000) (02/09)

"Forty years after the military operation in Vietnam, American and NATO forces are preparing for a major offensive in southern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border.... Helmand and other southern Afghan areas are near the Pakistani border. There is a likelihood that once the pressure on the [Afghan] Taliban increases; they might rush towards Pakistan's tribal areas for refuge. Although the Pakistani and U.S. Military leaders are in contact on how to keep the emerging situation under control, it is important for democratic stability [in Pakistan] that the new U.S. operation should be prevented from adding to Pakistan's military and political difficulties. Pakistan has set up around 1000 checkpoints along the Afghan border while there are only 100 checkpoints on the Afghan side. America and the allied forces must work on a balanced plan with Pakistan to protect Pakistani borders from pressure by the fleeing, defeated Taliban."

Editorial: Statement By U.S. Secretary Of State: A Matter Of Concern, an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (02/09)

"U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton has said that it is frightening for the American public to imagine that Al Qaeda terrorists might get the weapons of mass destruction. She said that Al Qaeda is active in Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. In fact, Clinton's statement is a toxic for the rulers of these countries. We think that it is high time for the Muslim governments to review their pro-U.S. policies."

Opinion: The Afghanistan Conferences, an op-ed by Arif Ayub in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/09)

"In the past few weeks there have been a plethora of conferences on Afghanistan starting with Islamabad, Dubai, Istanbul and finally London. This flurry of activity was basically aimed at providing international support for the new U.S. policy on Afghanistan.... Another major focus of the London conference was the \$500 million fund for buying out low-level Taliban fighters as part of the reintegration strategy. The problem in Afghanistan however is that while the Afghans are not averse to accepting money from anyone the results are always temporary and last as long as the money lasts. Moreover, money is not always the decisive factor and the limitations of this policy have been shown in the ineffectiveness of the large rewards for Osama and Umar.... While the conferences have put in place a good change in policy it would be a difficult task to reconcile the position still being maintained by the Taliban calling for a complete withdrawal of troops and the U.S. demand that the Taliban stop their attacks."

Opinion: New Buzzwords: Reintegration And Reconciliation: Good Taliban/Bad Taliban Is Now Kosher! - an op-ed by Wajid Naeemuddin in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (02/09)

"This is not to suggest that the U.S. is the weaker party. With a 3 million strong army (including reserves) and a horrendous nuclear arsenal (which continues to grow) and a delivery system with global reach, it could, in theory, use its lethal cargo to wipe out life from the face of the earth. Its weakness lies in the fact that its frequent political blunders keep landing it into one super-sized problem after another across the globe.... Unless America revises its lop-sided, hurtful and unjust policy towards Muslims - a policy working in tandem with Israel's long term expansionist plans - the hatred Muslims feel towards it would fuel a -Qaeda like thinking and actions on a wide scale. America's failure not to see this cause and effect phenomenon has led it into a blind alley from which it will find no 'honorable' exit.... If eventually the 'reintegration' proposal fails, as is more than probable, the U.S. civil strife Pakistan would have a better chance to let U.S. off the hook if it is allowed to play a role in talking to the Taliban whom it knows and understands better than any other country or political entity in the world."

Opinion: Behind Kayani's Training Offer To Afghans, an op-ed by Rahimullah Yusufzai in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/09)

"Chief of the Army Staff Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has offered to train

the Afghan army and police. In diplomatic circles, particularly Western, the move was described as bold and daring. However, doubts were raised about its practicability in view of the past bitterness in bilateral relations.... One major concern for the Afghans is that the ISI would recruit Afghan army officers if they are sent for training to Pakistan, which would then use them for its strategic goals in Afghanistan. It isn't clear if the Afghans have the same worry regarding Indian intelligence agencies, including RAW, recruiting their army and police officers during training in India. Pakistan would certainly be conscious of the Indian possibility and one important reason for its offer to train the Afghan army and police is to prevent this."

Editorial: Prospects Of Talks With India, an editorial in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (02/09)

"If the bilateral talks, hinted at by Chidambaram, have to proceed beyond a mere photo-op, there is a need to agree on an agenda aimed at addressing the real issues that have kept the pot boiling in South Asia. To begin with, New Delhi needs to de-link the issue of militancy from bilateral talks, as was agreed by the prime ministers of the two countries at Sharm el-Sheikh. India later reneged on the commitment.... Peace in South Asia will benefit all, most of all India, which is keen to reach Central Asian markets through Pakistan. There is all the more reason for it to agree to resolve the outstanding disputes with Pakistan by resuming composite dialogue."

Editorial: India Should Understand The Ground Reality, an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000)(02/09)

"Realizing the ground reality, India must come to the negotiating table. It must understand that adopting any other path would only take the region towards destruction, and thereby be to the terrorists' advantage."

Editorial: Does the government want to put the Kashmir and water issues on the back burner?, an editorial in the second-largest, nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (02/09)

"Sudden Indian eagerness for a dialogue with us is not without reason. Putting more pressure on Pakistan to eradicate alleged terrorism seems to be the driving force behind the dialogue offer, and American blessing would have been instrumental in this respect. The agenda of dialogue that India has hinted at has focused on counter-terrorism and infiltration. It is not difficult to understand that India does not want to talk on Kashmir and water issues.... First of all we should finalize the talks agenda and if India does not agree to include Kashmir and water disputes in it then we should simply refuse to sit at the table."

Opinion: Robert Gates' Threat Of War, an op-ed by General Mirza Aslam Beg (Retd) in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/09)

"Mr. Robert Gates, as well as the Indian military planners, while taking into cognizance the existing military balance between Pakistan and India, must also consider the new phenomenon of the Asymmetric War, which, during the last thirty years, has established the supremacy of Men and Missiles, over the most modern and technologically superior armed forces of the world, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Kashmir. The Asymmetric War, in essence is the name of the Islamic Resistance, with its hardcore resting along the Durand Line. It is our strength. Thus, conventional as well as irregular armed forces, together provide the emerging shape of the Fourth Generation of modern warfare, as Joseph S. Nye, the former Assistant Secretary of Defence U.S. and a professor of Harvard University, defines: 'The hybrid wars, conventional and irregular forces combatants and civilians become thoroughly intertwined' to win wars and help establish the new order. In case, war is forced on Pakistan, it would be a long and decisive war, where new geo-political realities would emerge, and establishing new frontiers of peace in the region."

Editorial: A Peaceful Agenda, an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/09)

"President Ahamdinejad has announced that Iran will start producing 20 percent enriched uranium from today at the Natanz plant.... It is a pity that once again there has been a barrage of criticism from the western capitals. This is unfortunate, as it shows their nuclear double standards. The statement by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Iran is a 'real' threat to the U.S. would further ratchet up tensions. Such arrogance flies in the face of the Nobel Peace award given to President Obama and his so-called initiative to improve ties with the Muslim world. It is a crying shame that while Iran's nuclear program, which in the past had got a clean chit by the IAEA, is being seen as a threat to world peace, countries like Israel armed with a huge nuclear arsenal, guilty of state terrorism are being patronized. The U.S. must play the game by the rules. The Obama Administration's uncompromising stand on the nuclear issue would serve no useful purpose."

Editorial: Iran's Nuclear Stance, an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/09)

"What is one to make of all this? It is plain that the six powers and the IAEA which are negotiating with Iran are not unanimous in their approach. The U.S. and Britain - though their stance has softened somewhat of late - are convinced that Iran has nuclear ambitions and should be checked by a fourth round of sanctions against it. There are others such as Russia and China who want to tread carefully. Small wonder Iran has capitalized on these divisions. However, it has been careful about not offering any technical justification to the IAEA. The inspectors have not expressed full satisfaction at the limited cooperation offered to them by Tehran either. All this makes for instability and tension which is not conducive to peace in the region."

Editorial: KSA's Principled Position On Israel, an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (02/09)

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has done well in reiterating its principled position on Palestinian issue and relations with Israel, stating that Israel's Arab neighbors want peace, but they cannot be expected to tolerate what amounts to theft, and certainly should not be pressured into rewarding Tel Aviv for the return of land that does not belong to it in the first place.... King Abdullah had proposed a widely acclaimed land for peace formula for a durable peace in the Middle East but unfortunately the Jewish State failed to respond to the initiative in a positive manner.... This is the only viable solution to the longstanding dispute and we hope President Obama and other members of the international community would urge Israel to respond to them in the same spirit."

(All circulation figures are based on estimation)
Patterson